DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 307 201 SO 019 937

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TITLE Student Journals: One Geographer's Perspective.
PUB DATE 6 Oct 88
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council for Geographic Education (Salt Lake City, UT, October 5-8, 1988). Student writing samples may not reproduce clearly.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Course Content; *Geography Instruction; Higher Education; Instructional Improvement; *Journal Writing; Program Descriptions; Social Studies; *Student Journals; *Writing Across the Curriculum; *Writing Improvement
IDENTIFIERS *Expressive Writing

ABSTRACT

Describing one teacher's experiences with journal writing as personal habit and as a requirement for the students in his geography classes, this paper discusses the teacher's increasing reliance on student logs, which counted initially for less than 10 percent of the course grade and ended by counting for 30-40 percent of the grade. Writing helps students organize their thoughts on topics and involves them more deeply in the subject matter as they search for the answers to assigned log entries. The goal of the logs is to encourage expressive writing because it closely approximates the thought process. The mechanics of using logs in class are explored, including uniformity, grading criteria, and format. Student logs also benefit the instructor, as they provide timely feedback on the success of lectures and highlight problems encountered by students while working on projects. Nine excerpts from student logs are presented. Five references are included. (GEA)

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Prepared for:

Annual Meeting of the National
Council for Geographic Education

Salt Lake City, Utah
6 October 1988

SO 019937

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STUDENT JOURNALS: ONE GEOGRAPHER'S PERSPECTIVE

My perspective on a chronological collection of personal writings has changed considerably over the last three decades. As a teenager, I never considered taking up the habit of diary keeping--something my friends and I believed to be the turf of our female classmates. Had a teacher in the sputnik era asked us to write down our feelings about life in general or about a particular facet of a class, I am sure we would have been mortified. Not a single instructor in my two decades of formal education asked me to do what I now require all my students to do.

During my dissertation field work (1969-70) I would loved to have discovered diaries of the farmers from whom I was seeking historical land rental information. Although I interviewed over seven hundred, I never found one who, when struggling to recall the years he farmed a particular tract, went to consult his diary.

I first kept a logbook (the term I prefer) in 1977--but only for the summer months during which I worked in Louisiana, Missouri, and Ontario for an Illinois seed corn company. To this day I am not really sure why I began keeping a log. Perhaps I did it in anticipation of an upcoming fall field class in which I planned to require student logbooks. That was the first field class I taught and the first of any kind wherein I required a student logbook.

I finally started keeping my own year-round log in 1981 and must admit I

look forward each night to getting the day's events (and my reactions to them) on paper. Since the late 1970s I have insisted that all my field geography classes and since the mid-1980s that all my classes keep logs as a part of their graded assignments.

My decision to require logs came about in virtual ignorance of the growing popularity among teachers of journal keeping by students. I had heard about the writing-across-the-curriculum movement and had even recommended several of my departmental colleagues for slots in campus workshops where they would hear members of the English faculty praise journals. Because of my role as chair, however, I never got the chance to participate myself in such training. As I made plans for this paper, I contacted our writing-across-the-curriculum director and asked about bibliographical references on the subject. He said he would send me a list; but in the meantime, I should look up the work of one key author. The director never did send me that list, but the name Toby Fulwiler was all I needed to tap into a fascinating array of success stories.

Fulwiler is on the faculty at the University of Vermont. Before Vermont he was at Michigan Technological Institute. In a 1980 article entitled "Journals Across the Disciplines" he argued for student journals as a way of getting writers to write expressively instead of transactionally (that is, to inform, instruct, or persuade). Expressive writing closely approximates the thought process. And in learning, the process of thinking is as important or even more important than the product. Fulwiler's magnum opus on journals is The Journal Book, which he published in 1987. In the book, a Fulwiler-edited collection of forty-two items, we learn of the many ways that journals have influenced the educational process. One part focuses on how English and lan-

guage arts teachers at grade levels as low as first have employed them. Another part deals with journals in history, philosophy, foreign language, and the arts. Finally we find a third, albeit brief, segment entitled "Journals and the Quantitative Disciplines." These include physics, chemistry, math, sociology, political science, and geography. The geographer, Bradley Baltensperger at Michigan Tech, wrote a short piece about his use of the journal as his only grading device in a sophomore-level economic geography course. He concluded that students not only liked this unusual approach but seemed to learn the material better than when he had used more traditional grading methods.

The Journal Book serves as a watershed in my affair with student logbooks. From the fall field class of 1977 through my senior seminar in the spring of 1988 I took a fairly low key approach to the matter. Initially logs seemed like a good way for me to obtain feedback about class projects and about individual student concerns, successes, failures, and so forth. Logs never counted in my classes for more than ten percent of the course grade. I only collected them at midsemester and the end of the semester. I told the students to get a notebook of any size, even a remnant from a prior class, and to write down their reactions to what we did as a class or what they did on their own that was related to the class. Students knew they would be accountable just twice per semester, and then only with plenty of warning; so procrastinators could practice their craft right up to the last minute. Typically in the first half of the semester they told me more about what they did than how they felt about it. I now know many were writing in a transactional rather than the preferred expressive mode. By the time they turned in their logs a second and final time, most of them in the senior-dominated field geog-

raphy classes had more or less left the transactional for the expressive.

As the early eighties came and went, I grew more convinced of the value of student logs and began assigning them to my junior-level lecture courses, Climate and Geography of Illinois. While the field class primarily reacted to projects, readings, and written assignments, the Climate and Illinois students provided me feedback on my lectures. I found quite helpful the opportunity to read how what I thought I said really came through to the typical twenty-year-old. For one Illinois class I put together, after the midsemester collection of logs, a list of good and poor entries. I handed the list to them in hopes of seeing an improvement in the second half entries. When that effort seemed to bear fruit, I took entries from the logs of the 1985 field class and prepared a handout for the first day of the 1986 class. I continue to use such handouts of actual entries when appropriate. By the middle of the decade I was telling students to record in their logs commentary on the reactions to every class, every outside reading, all writing, and anything else relevant to the course.

All of the preceding leads us to the present semester, during which I have made a dozen major changes in my approach to student logbooks. First, logs now count for 30-40 percent rather than less than 10 percent of the course grade. Second, to emphasize the heightened importance, I devote considerable space in each syllabus to a discussion of the logbook. Third, I ask students to bring logs to class daily and to be ready to turn them in for a grade or write in them or read from them to the class. Fourth, students must do directed (instructor-initiated) entries either in class or during some other time frame I specify. They continue, of course, to do independent entries on their own as they see fit--in much the same way as in the previous

decade. Fifth, all entries require a unique title, some of which I provide for directed entries. Students learn to value titles, and they get practice in choosing appropriate titles. Sixth, I collect logbooks every two or three weeks. Although more frequent collections take additional time on my part, the benefits of greater and more timely feedback plus the chance to interact better with each student make it time well spent. Seventh, I keep my own log of in-class, directed entries and write while they are writing to lend extra credibility to the assignment. Eighth, we share directed entries in pairs, small groups, or the class as a whole. Sharing helps build group skills--another instructional goal of mine. Ninth, I standardized the dimensions of the logbooks and permit only spiral-bound notebooks. Both requirements facilitate collection and han[illegible] of logs, especially from lecture classes. For my field class this fall, the Department bought them each a $.79 spiral notebook to assure standardization. Tenth, students now begin each new entry on a new page--a practice that helps me keep entries separate and to make visual comparisons of length. Eleventh, I break down the points from each collection into separate totals for format, directed entries, and independent entries. As the semester progresses, format becomes less valuable and independent entries more valuable. Finally, I will now require them to index their logs at semester's end and to write an essay to evaluate what they wrote during the previous fifteen weeks. So far, I am quite pleased with the changes.

Now the time has arrived to share some logbook entries from this semester with you. First come directed, in-class entries; then directed, out-of-class entries; and finally independent entries.

For both Field Geography (19 students) and my Earth Science classes (two

sections, each with 48 students) I asked at the first class session that students set down personal goals for their course. Remember that these in-class entries typically catch the students by surprise and that they have only a few minutes to compose themselves and their response (Examples 1 and 2).

After I graded and turned back their first short essay, I talked at length with the field class about improvements in their written work. Then I asked them to tell me through their journals how they were going to do better (Example 3).

Because of time constraints, we have few in-class, directed entries in the Earth Science classes. For September 6, however, we did one called "How Can I Help Combat the Greenhouse Effect" that got my attention. Many students, as it turned out, had the greenhouse effect confused with ozone depletion and urban ozone alerts. What began as a directed entry in their logbooks ended up being an unscheduled lecture to help them unscramble the three issues.

Out-of-class, directed entries average about one per week for both courses. Sometimes I specify the day I want them to make the entry. Such was the case with the Earth Science entry, "Temperatures Today" in which I hoped students would look closely at air temperatures on September 1. About half thought I wanted them to reflect on the hot summer of 1988, but either way I had them thinking.

Sometimes with an out-of-class, directed entry I do not specify the date. I tried this approach with an Earth Science entry called "Gilbert's Effects on Me" that I assigned even before Hurricane Gilbert slammed into the mainland.

I used an out-of-class entry for the field course in lieu of a set of

study questions. That entry, "Impressions of my Stream from 1982 Aerial Photos," served my purpose of forcing them to look closely at a handful of photos prior to a field exercise during which they and their teammates walked and studied several miles of stream.

Out-of-class, directed entries are great when the professor has to be absent. For Earth Science, on September 26, I had students watch a videotape in the classroom while I was conducting a workshop elsewhere. They were to pick out two of the scientific investigations highlighted in the tape and compare purposes and results.

The versatility of the directed entry impresses me. Most students will do them because they have become comfortable following instructions and doing that which carries a grade value.

With independent entries, however, one gets far more variety in number and quality of entries. I have found, even with the geography majors I have in the field class, that I must be insistent about the minimum number of independent entries I expect per week. Eventually I hope logs will reach or even exceed the entry rate that students in former semesters achieved when I just encouraged them to write about it if it had to do in any way with my course. Obvious subjects for independent entries include readings (Example 4), lectures (Example 5), and writing assignments (Example 6). Other good uses are up to the students: sorting out ideas (Example 7), relating other things to the course (Example 8), special efforts (Example 9), and so forth.

That students who seriously keep logbooks benefit from so doing is generally accepted among those who teach writing and by others who seek improvement of students' writing skills. Students get to experiment and interact with one who is presumably a more polished writer. Students keep in

closer contact with the content of their logged courses out of necessity as they seek subject matter for entries.

But what of the teacher who assigns the logbook? What does he or she derive other than the not insignificant satisfaction of helping a young writer? At least two other gains come immediately to mind. First, I truly enjoy the time spent reading their logbooks. I am under no pressure to point out writing errors or suggest improvements. I can relax and read, almost like a third party since they tend to forget who is going to be reading their entries. Second, I learn how well, or sometimes how badly, they understood a lecture or reading. I try to profit from such revelations either immediately or for future classes. It surely is nice now and then to read that something you did in class went over well--especially when the student noted it that night in his or her journal rather than several months later on a course evaluation.

Yes, this geographer has changed his views about journals over the decades and over the last few months. I remain, however, a staunch believer in their value to the student and the instructor.

Now I am wondering whether I have had any impact on you. Please turn to the last page of the handout, which should be a blank sheet of tablet paper. Let us do an in-class, directed entry for Thursday, October 6, 1988, entitled "Would Student Journals Work for Me?" We will write for two minutes and then share our thoughts.

SOURCES CONSULTED

Autrey, Ken. "The Personal Journal in Composition Instruction: A History," Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Atlanta, Georgia, 19-21 March 1987. ERIC, ED 282 250.

Bozik, Mary. "The Use of Student Journals in the Basic Speech Course," Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association, Denver, Colorado, 7-10 November 1985. ERIC, ED 265 583.

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_____, ed. The Journal Book. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1987.

Tuesday, August 23, 1988

"My Personal Goals for Geo 310"

Until now, I have taken classes dealing mainly with lecture and book work. I am looking forward to becoming familiar with the many different methods used to obtain the correct data for constructing maps. For example, Cartography has shown me how to make a map, but, I have yet to become familiar with the ways of obtaining the precise data needed. I hope Geo 310 will teach me these methods of data aquisition.

Attacking field problems is another skill I have yet to be exposed to. By the end of the course, I hope to have the skills needed to attack field-related problems.

Since my writing capability has much to be desired, an improvement in ~~to~~ my ~~writ~~ writing skills and capabilities will be welcomed. A log will also keep me busy as to how to keep up with the necessary coursework.

Example 1

Monday, August 22, 1988; My Personal Goals for this Course.

I find I'm going to have a few personal goals for this class. One is to always stay on top of my work. I hold a high interest in Science and I'd like to get a good grade in this class. Another goal is to enjoy this class. Also, I have many questions in my mind right now about the material we will probabey cover that are unanswered to me. Finally, I'm exetremely worried about this logbook. I have never kept one before!

Example 2

Tuesday, Sept. 6, 1988; How can I make my paper on the physical geography project better than the one on the bike path project?

Like I've said, the first one is always the hardest simply because every one has their style they want put forth. But now that I have the results from the first writing assignment I will certainly be active in voice as best as I know how. I will not put a cover page on the short essay, nor will I slack on finding a splashy title. Each page will be looked over with much scrutiny to correct any mishaps in my typing abilities errors. Capital letters for each word in the title will close the top of the first page, but very a number shall I apply there; only on page 2!
If I have something to refer to I shant write the word "this"; that is a no-no. I will make 7 or 8 rough drafts if that is what it takes.

EXCELLENT

Format 8/8 -

Directed 14/14 -

Indep. 15/15 - There are especially nice. Great start and great attitude.

35/35

"Splashy" titles are not needed just a description of what follows.

Example 3

Saturday... September 17, 1988: Questions on Orienteering

I read through about the first 2/3 of the ~~Book~~ orienteering book. There were some areas that were very familiar to me so I simply skimed through it. For the most part the book is very simple to understand, in fact at times, too simple. There are some things which I feel will need to be discussed in class before we go on our orienteering adventure. I didn't ~~not~~ take full understanding to all the different compass types but much like chapter 3 of the text, you really need to get hands on for full understanding. Another item was adjusting your compass to compensate for the magnetic & real norths. I realize that different areas need to make different compensations but how is this calculated and how does this apply when orienteering. first questions

I enjoyed reading the book as well as playing with the maps & compass in the back. I'm looking forward to the actual orienteering exercise.

Example 4

Wednesday, September 7, 1988
Questions of Isohels

A few weeks ago in class, Aug. 31, we were talking about the isohels & I'm still confused as to exactly what is to. I have it found it in the book yet either. You said it was a line connecting points of equal receipts of solar radiation for a given time period. What are the equal receipts? (1)
What would the given time period be? (2)

Also on that day there was mention of a radiation window. Where and what is a radiation window? How did the atmosphere as earth get this window? (3)

(1) equal amounts like 150 langleys per day
(2) per minute, per hour, per day, etc
(3) imaginary window & its effects are all over the world
see fig 3.2 and caption "hourly relative transparency are indicated by yellow shades." There are the windows."

Example 5

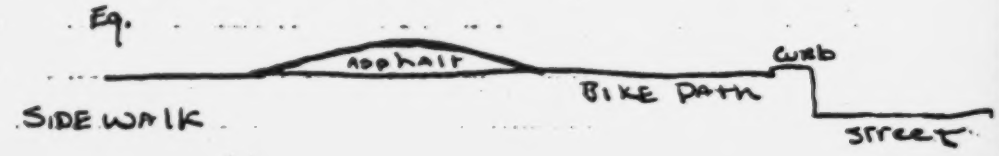
Sunday, August 28, 1988; The complexities of writing the bike path paper.

My essay is finished now, but it certainly wasn't as easy as it at first appeared it might be. Since I walk that very route a half dozen times a day, I thought I knew it. Not until I really started thinking about having to write on improvements to it did I realize exactly what was there. Saturday night I could not get to sleep, thinking of how I could revise my earlier plans to include my new awareness of the situation. I have gained a new respect for persons in charge, or working on, of planning activities. Such a seemingly simple task can actually take so many avenues; and even then one is not guaranteed success and quite possibly proved inadequate. Having to sketch the map makes the plans jump out at me and instantly one can see whether the plan will work. I saw that mine didn't; so I set out again.

Example 6

Sunday 28 August 88 Procrastination

Right now I should be putting together my essay for this class but I just can't seem to get myself going I have ~~about~~ About 1 full page written so far and if I just sat down and worked on it I could wipe it out in an hour or so but then comes the typing (yuk). Going out to my stretch yesterday brought me some ideas on segregation of pedestrians and bicycles for the entire system but thinking about them I've come up with a couple of drawbacks including problems with handicapped students and a general dang possible dangerous situation. The plan in general is to build a shallow mound of black top (asphalt) to create a barrier between sidewalk and bike path



The idea being to build it shallow enough so that there is general ease of passage over it by both bike & pedestrian. Have to give it more thought on the danger and handicap problem. Well I guess I have done some work on the paper. Maybe this entry should be titled moderate Procrastination!

Writing is a good way to sort things out in our mind

Wednesday Aug. 31, 1988 Sand

When I am out golfing I run into more sand on the course than I do at a beach. Why is sand there? Whose bright idea was it to put sand there? Its bad enough we have to hit over water and through trees but hitting out of sand is the worst. I have more shots there than anywhere. I can never tell how to hit, do you hit behind the ball, do you take a little sand. Why can't we leave the sand on the beaches?

first golf courses in Scotland and on beaches. Sand has become traditional

Example 8

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 1988 "THE CAMERA RUN" — Nice

Remember the idea of taking pictures of each sample site? This idea appealed so much to me I decided to pursue it. I went to the drug store and bought 35mm, 24 exposure slide film.

I had a dual purpose for this exercise. Since I was supposed to workout today I smartly decided to combine running and taking pictures at the same time - obviously stopping to take the pictures. I managed to get the pictures of each site and points of interest at these sites. I felt as if I was running a steeple chase or and orienteering race. I hope these slide pictures prove helpful to our presentation.

Example 9